

## James M. Parsons

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## NOTABLE DEATHS

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JAMES M. PARSONS, late associate justice of the Iowa Supreme Court, died in Des Moines, December 16, 1937, following several months illness and an unsuccessful operation. The son of Mr. and Mrs. Silas Parsons, pioneer settlers of Iowa, he was born on a farm four miles southwest of Anamosa, Jones County, Iowa, October 16, 1858. With the death of his mother in 1868 he was left an orphan. In the fall of 1876 he matriculated at Iowa State College, only to transfer to Cornell College the following year, where he remained two years. In 1879 the successful defense of his interests in the estate of his father against the claims of his guardian induced him to forsake the profession of civil engineering for that of the law. Entering upon such a career in 1879, he was admitted to the state bar the succeeding year at Anamosa. In 1881 he located in Rock Rapids where he remained, serving a term as Mayor and a term as county attorney for Lyons County, until 1906, when he removed to Des Moines. For many years he was counsel for the Iowa Bankers Association. In 1934 he was successful in a candidacy for the Iowa Supreme Court. A life long Democrat, he was a recognized leader in his party.—K.E.C.

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If we look back seventy-nine years over the history of Iowa we cover the span of Judge Parsons' life, for, within the borders of Iowa he was born and here he spent his entire career.

There seem to be some men who pass thru life, regardless of honors that may come to them, regardless of the positions they hold, whose title is not that used by their friends in salutation. Judge Parsons was known as "Jim" Parsons. This circumstance is complimentary, and means that honor rather than disrespect was intended.

Judge Parsons' life was lived in the best American tradition, a tradition which we all trust will for many generations continue to stand as emblematic of the aims, ideals and possibilities of this great country. We have here a poor boy, who thru his own enterprise and energy, received an education that gave him the profession which for so many years he graced so ably. He started out in life to become a civil engineer but that did not meet with his approval and he commenced the study of law in an office in southeastern Iowa. In 1880, six days after his twenty-second birthday, he was admitted to the practice of law.

In the conduct of litigation in trial courts he was tactful and courteous. His methods were direct and his presentation distinguished by candor and good humor. He was forceful, and if the occasion warranted, eloquent in argument. His practice covered the entire field of the law. It is doubtful if any man in the history of Iowa has played a more important part in the legal profession than did Judge Parsons. Fifty-six years of continuous participation in the trial of cases, criminal

and civil alike; for more than twenty years the general counsel of the Iowa Bankers Association; and finally, elevated by the people of his native State to its highest court.

Early in his career Judge Parsons affiliated with the Democratic party. He was a partisan but not one of that type who could not extend to everyone the right to differ with him upon political questions. He did not seek political office. His party had several times urged him to accept nomination for high office within the State but he desired to remain in the rank and file to fight for what he believed was right, rather than be rewarded with high office. In striking contrast to most men possessed of his extraordinary qualifications, Jim Parsons did not naturally crave the distinction of honor and leadership. He lacked the egotism of most political leaders. He was singularly free from any trace of conceit. He never lost his modest poise or was without his sense of humor for a moment. But, with all the admiration which his talents and ability commanded, Jim Parsons, the man, was even greater than Jim Parsons, the lawyer, the orator, the judge. He had a charming personality and to know him was to be his friend. He had a heart as big as his great body, and an unfailing geniality which made friends rapidly and retained them easily. He was unspoiled by any honor or distinction that came to him. He made friends and kept them. He made new friends and kept both the new friends and the old ones. How he found time for literally thousands of kindly acts which he knew would please some humble acquaintance, was the marvel of those who knew him best.

Judge Parsons was blessed far more than the average man in his splendid intelligence, and he was trebly fortunate in that for more than fifty years he enjoyed the love, affection and companionship of the girl whom he made his bride in 1883. Their life together was an inspiration to those who knew them. Mrs. Parsons had for her husband that rare understanding and sympathy that was unfailing and served as could nothing else, to smooth the rough spots that are bound to appear in any life.

In 1934 Jim Parsons was elevated by the people to the Supreme Court of this State. He appreciated the honor but with it he accepted the responsibilities. His opinions are the highest tribute that can be paid to him as a lawyer and as a judge. The bar of Iowa of today is familiar with his record, and the bar of Iowa of tomorrow will learn it as it reads and cites his opinions. He was a man of remarkable industry, energy and capability. He had a fine instinct of justice. He was a wise judge, skilled in the law, and yet, ever the human being. The record of Judge Parsons upon the Supreme Court of Iowa, which is written in the law books, will serve as a guide to those who are to follow him to carry on the all-important work he performed so ably.

JUSTICE RICHARD F. MITCHELL.

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